

# Out of school youth

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# Valorisation

In this current section, the findings of this thesis will be placed in perspective of their usefulness and relevance at the societal level by transferring knowledge gained to a wider audience, as well as translating this knowledge into products and activities with a schedule and implementation plan.

Adolescence is a critical development period marked by the exploration of various identities within the adolescent's personal and social environments. The impact of these identity processes may place young people at risk for experimenting and taking up negative health behaviours, such as alcohol and tobacco use, leading to both immediate and long term social and health consequences. It is therefore in this phase of life that we must intervene to protect young people from harmful influences, but also promote healthy behaviours that will set them up for a long, healthy, and happy life. Studies on alcohol and tobacco use among adolescents in South Africa have focused on in-school learners, however, out of school youth (OSY) or school dropouts are vastly under researched. Globally, approximately 120 million children are out of school, with almost half residing in sub-Saharan Africa. Students who fail to complete their schooling are more likely to experience negative social, health and economic issues such as unemployment, delinquency, and poor mental and physical health. Compared to in-school learners, OSY do not have the protective factor of the school environment and positive mentoring by teachers and peers. The high rates of dropout combined with the increased risk of alcohol and tobacco use among OSY calls for the exploration of social and cognitive correlates of early school leaving in combination with alcohol and tobacco use. Such action is not only critical in terms of reducing inequality and poverty, but also in averting the health and economic impact of the consequences of behaviours that place young people at risk.

The research in this thesis builds on and affects several areas of work, involving a range of stakeholders working across disciplines. The academic beneficiaries that would benefit from this research include those in the field of psychology, public health, sociology, education, social work, anthropology, behavioural health communication and health promotion. The results of this thesis will add to the body of knowledge on youth risk behaviours and forms an evidence base to inform future work for OSY and the behaviours that place them at risk. The thesis features results from original large scale survey data and qualitative data from in-depth interviews obtained from OSY in South Africa, benefiting both quantitative and qualitative researchers in the field of behavioural science. Health promoters and researchers will gain insight into intervention strategies across the school, home and community to discourage school dropout, alcohol and tobacco use among OSY. School counsellors, health practitioners, adolescents in and out of school, NGO's working with adolescents and parents or guardians could benefit from the results of the study by gaining an in-depth understanding of adolescents' reasons for leaving school and the determinants of their alcohol and tobacco use. Furthermore, the findings of the thesis are aligned with the National Youth Policy that the National Department of Health (NDOH) and Education is implementing in South Africa. The National Youth Policy is a framework for youth development across the country. It endeavours to ensure all young people are given meaningful opportunities to reach their full potential, both as individuals and as active participants in society. The findings of this thesis has provided valuable insight into the profile of OSY at risk of early school leaving alcohol and tobacco use. The results of this thesis suggest that preventing school dropout and alcohol and tobacco use would require tailored intervention programmes to be grounded within a framework of poverty reduction and social upliftment of young people. These interventions would also benefit from

incorporating the wider social environment, while also considering the gender, racial and geographical differences found in the reasons for leaving school, and in alcohol and tobacco use.

The study will be communicated to the international community through presentations at international conferences and publications in academic journals. The results of the study will be communicated to the public in the form of a policy brief, electronic and paper based media. Additionally, the research team received a grant to pursue further work in designing and implementing a pilot study exploring the determinants of behaviours that place out of school youth at risk using digital storytelling. This project will expand on the current level of knowledge in understanding the social and cognitive correlates of risk behaviours in this hidden population, and gives rise to many possibilities for the development of novel data collection methods and interventions using technology that target individuals and the community. The research team will also continue to apply for local grants that will enable the team to organise small symposiums or workshops to prompt further discussions and action on the topic.